# Seventy Five Years of HIBBARD HARDWARE

1855 ··· 1930

FRED C. KELLY

ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY



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SEVENTY - FIVE

YEARS

*of*

HIBBARD

HARDWARE

*This edition of five thousand copies*
*is privately printed for*
HIBBARD, SPENCER, BARTLETT & CO.
*of which this is No.* 604
*and is presented by them to*
T. G. Samuelson

DEDICATED

TO

THE MEMORY OF THE FOUNDER

WILLIAM GOLD HIBBARD

# SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS *of* HIBBARD HARDWARE

*The Story of*

HIBBARD, SPENCER, BARTLETT & CO.



BY FRED C. KELLY

*Author of "Human Nature in Business"*
*"Why You Win or Lose"*

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# INTRODUCTION

This book is obviously not a complete history of the 75 years of Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co. With hundreds of employes, all contributing to the success of the business, the complete story could not be compressed into one volume. But the objection to a history covering all the ground is that it might be more interesting to those behind the scenes than to outsiders. It might be a little like the average newspaper in a small town, eagerly read by people who live there and know every name mentioned, but seldom if ever bought by a stranger. The out-of-town visitor knows that anything of enough importance to interest *him* would probably be recorded also in the larger city papers. In preparing this book, the aim has similarly been always to keep away from those phases of the complete story which would be of mere parochial rather than of general interest. In other words, this book was not written for the home paper or for the family circle but for everybody. It doesn't attempt to touch on more than the high points.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Except for the hearty co-operation of various officers of the company and other employes familiar with the early history and spirit of Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co., the preparation of this book would have been difficult, if not impossible, instead of the pleasant task it has been. The author is especially indebted to Mrs. R. B. Gregory, daughter of William G. Hibbard, for her graciousness in permitting liberal helpings of priceless material, from her charmingly-written family history, to be incorporated into certain chapters here.



## SUMMARY OF HIBBARD HARDWARE HISTORY

1855 Firm of Tuttle, Hibbard & Co. founded on March 22. Store at 45 Water street.

1857 Fire destroys stock. Business resumed at 32 Lake street.

1860 Move to larger quarters at 62 Lake street.

1865 Firm name changed to Hibbard & Spencer.

1867 Business in larger quarters at 92-94 Michigan avenue.

1871 Stock burned in the Big Fire; business carried on temporarily in Mr. Hibbard's dwelling house.

1872 Once more in larger quarters at 30-32 Lake street.

1877 Firm becomes Hibbard, Spencer & Co.

1882 Business incorporated under name of Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co.

1890 Death of Franklin F. Spencer.

1902 Warehouse built and occupied on North Pier, Chicago River.

1903 New ten-story fireproof building completed at State street bridge. Death of William G. Hibbard. Election of A. C. Bartlett to presidency.

1914 Election of Charles H. Conover to presidency. A. C. Bartlett becomes chairman of board of directors.

1915 Death of Chas. H. Conover. J. J. Charles elected president.

1922 Death of A. C. Bartlett.

1925 State street plant condemned by city for boulevard.

1926 Death of J. J. Charles. C. J. Whipple elected president. Frank Hibbard elected chairman of board of directors. Modern 14-story distributing plant completed and occupied at 211 East North Water street.

1930 Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Company celebrate their 75th year.

Chapter I

# Hardware From the Human Angle

Selling hardware on a grand scale must be the most fascinating business on earth—because, more perhaps than any other business, it touches all human activity. Seventy-five years of hardware selling is a record of three-quarters of a century of changing human customs, of human progress. The story of hardware is the story of mankind.



*The First Hardware Retailer*

When Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co. distribute hardware through 75 years, they become as much a part of the history of the nation as if they had engaged in statecraft instead of in meeting ever-shifting human wants. Isn't it as important to know how people cooked their food, built their houses, or amused themselves, at any period of human history, as to know the names of men who came to the fore in politics or the military? Perhaps, as Hendrik Van Loon once suggested, a thousand years or so hence we may have encyclopedias containing such condensed references as: "Roosevelt—president of the United States at the time the Wright brothers invented the first successful flying machine." The true story of any nation is what the people themselves have been doing, how they did it, and why. Most of us satisfy our curiosity by asking merely what, where, or when. But the wise man wants to know why. I once asked Henry Ford how he goes about devising a newer or better

way to do a piece of work. Promptly he replied: "By first trying to find out *why* it was done as it has been done in the *past*."

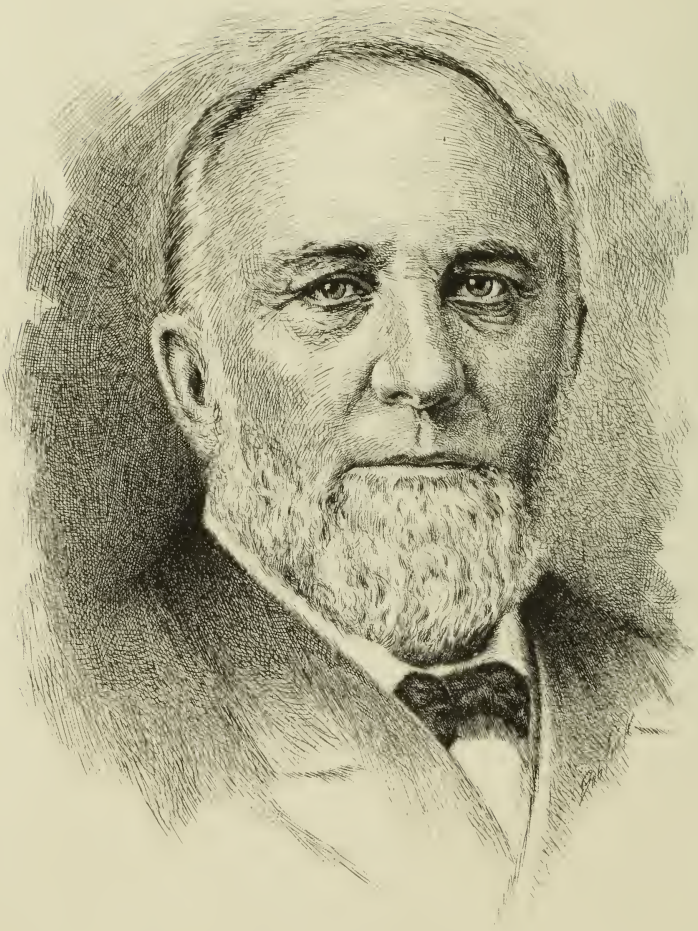
Away back yonder in the days when John Neanderthal and the rest of our primitive ancestors lived in caves, if anybody had been enterprising enough to go into retail trade to supply the most items needed by the greatest number of people, he would have started a hardware store. The first crude pottery, stone hammers and flint weapons used by savages would naturally have been suitable merchandise for a hardware dealer. Indian relics, or their duplicates, would still be listed in a hardware catalogue if modern improvements on the same devices were not available.

Once a child has begun to take note of the world about him, his interests are likely to be utensils of one kind or another, tools, and playthings — all obtainable at a hardware store. His first great adventure may be building a shack in the back yard. Turn a live boy loose on the streets of any city and when you find him he is probably standing in front of a hardware dealer's show window.

As we grow older, it is increasingly difficult to resist the appeal of a hardware store — tools that arouse our instinct of workmanship, labor-saving devices for the home — adults' playthings! We go into a hardware store to satisfy an urgent want and come away with something else that we didn't know we needed. Only yesterday I set out to buy a few nails to fix the dog-house and returned with an electric corn-popper!

No matter what the human being is about to do, he must first visit a hardware store. Before he can dig the foundation for his home, or a well for his water, he must have a pick and spade. Then he must have tools to build his house, besides all the hardware, including locks and hinges, that goes into it. Once the house is built, he can't cook his food without a stove and utensils from the hardware store. Neither can he eat without cutlery, also from the hardware dealer. If he tries to raise his own vegetables and keep his lawn looking decent, he must buy — well, everybody knows what an incredible array of articles a man

will bring home once he starts monkeying with a garden. In lighting his house, in painting it, in getting himself transported to and from it—and finally for his recreations, whether hunting, fishing or listening to a radio, the man who dwells in a house discovers almost every hour of the day that his life is all bound up with hardware. His wife may buy a yard of calico, which has nothing to do with hardware, but she can't make it into a dress or apron without needles, scissors, or perhaps even a sewing-machine. Small wonder that hardware seems to those who sell it to be more human than any other kind of business.



William Gold Hibbard

Chapter II

# Mr. Hibbard Chooses Partners

Now, since hardware selling is an exceptionally human enterprise, it follows logically that the man who drives the stakes for a wholesale hardware business, destined to grow and endure through the mounting years, should himself be a man who loves his fellow human beings and understands them.



*Lydia Beekman Hibbard*

William Gold Hibbard, founder of Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co., was a successful business man partly because of his human sympathy and his rare gift for selecting associates. His greatest achievement as a keen judge of human character—and here he exhibited almost a stroke of genius—was when he took his first quick, comprehensive glimpse at the girl who seemed to him an ideal life partner and decided instantly that he wished to marry her. In later years, this ability to make quick decisions and to choose associates wisely proved to be one of his greatest business assets.

Young Hibbard had gone from his home town of Cortland, N. Y., to Chicago—landing there in 1849 with three dollars in his pocket—and took a clerkship in a hardware store. Six years later, in the spring of 1855, when he embarked in the hardware business for himself, his mother died and he made a trip back to Manlius, N. Y., his native locality, to attend her funeral. Since there were no trained nurses in those days, friends and neighbors had helped to take care of his mother during her last illness, and

among those who had been especially helpful were members of the Van Schaack household. It was when William Gold Hibbard went to thank this family for their kindness that he first saw Lydia B. Van Schaack. She was so wholesomely charming and overwhelmingly lovely that he then and there made a decision which must have had much to do with his successful life and the future of the business in which he was just starting. He didn't actually ask her to marry him until a day or two later, just before he was setting out again for Chicago; but so far as he was concerned, the whole affair was settled after the first instantaneous estimate of her charm and character. "He was a man," as his mother-in-law later declared, "whose course of action was always a word and a blow and the blow came first." He made up his mind that here was a girl whose like he could hardly hope to find again. If there were rival suitors, they would simply have to make other arrangements.

Though he did not know it, this young woman who met the ideal of his dreams, from her seat in the choir gallery during his mother's funeral, had observed him and thought what a good face that young chap Gold Hibbard had. A few days later, when he was walking away from her home, after his proposal of marriage, she ran hastily back to a kitchen window which commanded a good view of the street. She wished to have one more look, as she told her mother, at Gold Hibbard's face. She told him that she didn't know him well enough to marry him. The most she would promise was that they might write to each other. Hibbard's cause was greatly strengthened by the fact that *her* mother had often heard *his* mother talk about her only son in Chicago who was so good to her.

They became engaged and were married in December, 1855. Hibbard bought a high hat for his wedding, but forgot to bring it, and I like to think that maybe he forgot it on purpose. As another indication of his good judgment in picking the partner he did, the bride helped to wash and dress *nine* brothers and sisters the morning of her wedding day.

I have told of this little romance somewhat in detail not merely to provide an element of love interest for this business story, but because I regard it as of the greatest importance to the future growth and prosperity of the firm of Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co. Hibbard had not only shown his keenness of judgment in making a happy selection in the most hazardous of all partnerships, but he had also demonstrated his ability as a salesman. Indeed, since his courtship was so successfully carried on by correspondence, he had proved what he could do as a mail order sales director. His marriage was important to the future of his business in more ways than one. Because he had chosen wisely, his emotional life was never a problem. From then on, with a happy home background, he was free from such distractions or discords as might have prevented his throwing all his thought and energies into building a great business.

It was literally true, in more than one direction, that he started in a small way and grew. At the time of his marriage he weighed only 105 pounds and his wife 95. On their silver wedding day he weighed as much as had the two together. His first home, on Adams street, was so small that the extra trunk, containing winter or summer clothing not in use, had to be taken to his place of business for storage. Their sleeping quarters were so limited that he had to get in and out of bed by crawling over the foot. Small as it was, however, the little home soon gained a reputation for hospitality, and it was Hibbard's custom to invite young men who were away from home and boarding to come for Sunday dinner. This gift for warm friendships continued to be one of his outstanding characteristics all through his business career.

Andrew D. White, long after he had become famous in the world of diplomacy, recalled the days when he and Gold Hibbard were boys together in Cortland, New York, and Hibbard used to act as clerk occasionally in his father's general store. While in his 'teens, Hibbard, though a hail fellow well met, and much liked by his father's customers, took little interest in business or in any serious affairs, and this was a source of great

regret to members of his family. But following the death of his father, a great change came over him. From being careless and indifferent toward business, he plunged in with great energy and determination to wind up his father's affairs and set out for Chicago to take a job and make his way.

Hibbard's first connection in Chicago was with the wholesale hardware firm of Stimson & Blair, later William Blair & Company. His salary was $300 a year and board. In the beginning he had only such knowledge of hardware as he had picked up from seeing the limited line handled in his father's general store; but he absorbed knowledge readily and soon began to think of getting into business for himself. It was natural enough that a young man who had shown enough pioneer spirit to go all the way from New York state to Chicago in the days before railroads should not wish to go along indefinitely working for somebody else.

Hibbard had made the acquaintance of Nelson Tuttle, a former dry goods merchant, familiar with handling finances and credits and these two determined to establish a new hardware company. They took two other partners, Frederick Tuttle and George M. Gray, who, however, were never active in the business. Each of the four put in an equal share of the modest capital necessary, and the firm of Tuttle, Hibbard & Company, destined to become one of the great wholesale enterprises of the world, was formed on March 22, 1855. The *Daily Democratic Press,* in Chicago, Saturday morning, May 5, 1855, carried this notice, the first ever printed relating to Hibbard hardware:

> CO-PARTNERSHIP—THE UNDERSIGNED have this day formed a co-partnership under the firm and style of Tuttle, Hibbard & Co., for the transaction of the Wholesale Hardware Business at No. 45 South Water Street. FREDERICK TUTTLE.
> NELSON TUTTLE. WILLIAM G. HIBBARD. GEORGE M. GRAY.
> Chicago, March 22, 1855.

Inasmuch as Mr. Hibbard was the only one of the four who had knowledge of hardware, we may properly regard him as the real founder of the business.

Chapter III

# In the Beginning

The new firm did not begin business on too pretentious a plan. They didn't try to make a big showing or splurge. To the contrary, they attempted only what their modest capital would safely permit and their chief aim was to take such firm root as might insure steady growth. Their first store at 45 South Water street was in a building 24 feet wide and four stories high. It had a windlass for hoisting goods to the upper stories and a chute, or slide, upon which nails or other heavy material could be sent to the basement; but there was no elevator. Neither was there any heat except in the office. Business men had not yet learned that lack of heat was an expensive luxury—that even when engaged in physical activity many employes would be compelled to use too much of their energies in trying to keep warm. The entire personnel of the place, aside from the two active members of the firm, were a salesman, a bookkeeper, a receiving and shipping clerk, a packer, and a porter. Traveling salesmen had not yet been thought of. Their nearest approach to a modern catalogue was a monthly price-list of staple articles covering a single page.




*The First Store*

While neither Hibbard nor his associates could well have foreseen the tremendous growth of Chicago, which would help to make possible the expansion of their business, yet no extraordinary degree of imagination was necessary to peer into the future and see something fairly stupendous. Hibbard had only

to note the growth of the city during the few years he had lived in it to see a sample of what a place can do, once its future possibilities have aroused public enthusiasm. When he struck Chicago in 1849, the California gold rush was on, and "western fever" was still spreading. Thousands of people were headed toward the west, the far west if possible, but anyhow, west, and many decided when they reached Chicago, that they had gone far enough. Partly because of this westward rush, the city had grown from 28,269 in 1850 to 80,023 in 1855. When a young



*The Second Store*

man during six years of residence in a live city sees its population almost treble, no wonder that he recognizes it as a place of opportunity to enter business for himself. Looking back still farther, to 1831, only 18 years before his own arrival, he could see Chicago as little more than Fort Dearborn, a few huts occupied by halfbreeds, and wigwams of the Pottawatomie Indians —altogether about 60 people! A year later, though, the population had increased from 60 to 600.

Even with its population of more than 80,000 in 1855, Chicago was a-plenty crude. The first railroad to the East had been completed only three years previous and the first public water

works had been in operation barely a year. Lake street was the only paved street in town and it was only "planked." Because of the terrible condition of most streets, not more than three or four families in the whole city kept private carriages. Along the lake shore, carriages sank as deep as they did in the prairie mud only two blocks away. Michigan avenue was sparsely settled. Only two houses had been built in the block where the Congress Hotel stands today.

Where mud holes in the streets were especially bad, it was a common thing for practical jokers to place signs bearing such warnings as "No Bottom Here," or "Shortest Route to China." Even fashionable women were still being driven from one place to another in two-wheeled carts. A few old inhabitants still recall seeing one of these carts abandoned in a mud hole right in front of J. H. McVicker's Chicago Theater. It was at McVicker's, by the way, that little Mary McVicker, as Eva in "Uncle Tom's Cabin," first made everybody cry. This was years before she had become the wife of Edwin Booth, famous tragedian.

Buildings were so poorly heated that public entertainments during the winter months were not frequent. It was not unusual for a lecturer to step on the platform wearing his overcoat, gloves, and leggings. Because of the lack of organized social diversions, men devoted themselves to work and a business man was quite likely to stay at his office until 10 o'clock at night. Perhaps it is because of this tradition that Chicago business men still put in longer hours each day than are the rule in New York or in almost any other great American city.

While public entertainments were few, social life in comfortable homes was beginning. Dignified, square white houses of colonial design, with great pillars and spacious portico in front, and wide hallway through the middle, were becoming fairly numerous, and if one wished to give a formal home dinner, ice-cream could be bought any day in the year. The crinoline skirt, ascribed to the Empress Eugenie, had become fashionable in 1854, and women were mostly wearing long sleeves and high

necks. When social activity was lacking, people stayed at home and read stories by Charles Dickens which were being serialized, as rapidly as he wrote them, as a leading feature of a four page Chicago daily. Washington Irving, too, was at the height of his popularity and much read. "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was still a best seller. People were reading more and beginning to think of so-called cultural things. Home life was becoming less crude. More families were learning how to live well—and as they lived better their homes required better hardware in greater variety.

In the establishment of Tuttle, Hibbard & Company, perhaps the greatest contrast with modern business was the impossibility of speed in communication or transportation. The telegraph had been in use in Chicago since 1848, but mails were slow, trains uncertain, and shipments of goods from England sometimes never arrived at all. The steamer, *City of Glasgow,* had set out from Liverpool for New York, with 450 passengers, and has never been heard of from that day to this. The first Atlantic cable had not yet been laid. When one thinks of all that had not yet happened, that year when Hibbard hardware was first sold seems a long, long time ago. Not only were such modern inventions as the automobile, radio, aeroplane, talking machine and even electric light undreamed of, but there were no typewriters, telephones, or cash registers in business offices, and no trolley cars to ride home on. John Brown had not yet raided Harper's Ferry; the first petroleum oil well had not been opened; Buffalo Bill was a youngster only ten years old; and John L. Sullivan was still unborn!

It is doubtful if Tuttle, Hibbard & Company ever handled more than 2,000 different items, mostly staple and heavier articles. Today, Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co. handle nearly 60,000 items. In the early days few orders ever came from retail hardware dealers that didn't include horse shoes and horseshoe nails. There was steady demand for so-called Russian iron, then the only material used for stove-pipe, and all tin plate was imported. Copper, for the bottoms of washboilers, to be made up

usually by one's local tinner, was another important item. A list of the articles in almost daily demand would certainly have included: well buckets, moulding planes, shutter plates and screws (for store door shutters), muzzle loading guns, Rodgers, Needham, Wostenholm and IXL cutlery (English), blacksmiths' bellows and felloe oilers. I wonder how many of the present generation ever even heard of a felloe oiler. But we who used to take comely young women out buggy-riding in the days before automobiles, knew what a felloe oiler was! A hotbox on a buggy could make troublesome complications.

Just two years after its formation, the new firm of Tuttle, Hibbard & Co. lost heavily from a fire which destroyed its entire stock. They promptly resumed business, however, at 32 Lake street, where they remained for three years. Going through the panic of '57, with its depreciated currency and doubtful credits, while also weathering the effects of a disastrous fire, was a severe experience for a firm just getting a foothold; but, luckily, they had been laying conservative foundations and were able to pull through, still solvent, optimistic and courageous. In 1860, the firm sought new and better quarters at 62 Lake street. That was their location for about seven years, though in 1865, Tuttle, Hibbard & Co. ceased to exist under that name and became Hibbard & Spencer.




*The Third Store*



FRANKLIN F. SPENCER

Chapter IV

# Hibbard and Spencer

Mere chance often brings men together to become acquainted and help shape one another's destinies. Right next door to the original location of Tuttle, Hibbard & Co. was the office and warehouse of Jewett & Root, manufacturers of stoves, at Buffalo, and represented in Chicago by Franklin F. Spencer. Like Mr. Hibbard, Mr. Spencer had worked as a youngster in his father's general store in New York state.

Possibly because of congeniality due to the similarity of their backgrounds, the two men formed a strong friendship which led to their business partnership. It was a happy combination, for each had traits that supplemented the other's. Their friends used to observe that even their whiskers were charmingly free from wasteful duplication, inasmuch as Hibbard's were mainly on his chin and somewhat sedate, while Spencer's were gayly festooned at each side, a sort of elaboration of his moustache, with the chin itself clean-shaven. Spencer, from the first, devoted himself mainly to credits, in which line he was a genius. It is said that because of his intuitive gift, he could talk with a new customer for five minutes and say: "You look good to me. If you want credit up to $4,000 or $5,000 you can have it." And his quick estimates were uncannily dependable. Along with this ability for judging character was an exceptional capacity for making friends. He was genial, warm-hearted and generous. After the business had grown to sizable proportions, whenever a young woman employe got married, his associates used to laugh and say: "Watch Spencer now or he'll give her the entire store."

Whenever he heard of anybody in need, his invariable question was:

"Is there anything I can do to help?"

His purse was ever open to those less fortunate than himself. It was said that nobody in Chicago gave so much to unseen charity.

He lived somewhat luxuriously for those days and whenever his family had an out-of-season delicacy on the table, he was sure to mention several friends with whom he would like to share it.

So interested was Spencer in enlarging his list of friends that he not only was noted for his cordial handshake, but for years used a little drawing of an extended hand as part of his signature.

Nothing was too serious for him to turn to a joke. One day he came into Hibbard's private office to announce that he had just bought a lot in Graceland cemetery right across the drive from Hibbard's lot.

"You know," he said, "we have been such near neighbors and good friends for all these years, as well as partners in the hardware business, that I thought it would be fine, when our work is all done, for us to be so close together." Then, a moment later, he added: "I've got a notion, Hibbard, to have the lots connected by a tunnel under the driveway. In that way it might be a little easier to keep in touch with one another."

It was shortly after Mr. Spencer had entered the firm that the first traveling salesman began to make trips representing Hibbard & Spencer. He made his headquarters at Waterloo, Iowa. Each spring and fall he visited the principal towns in Iowa. For several years that was all the sales effort outside of the home office that the firm made, a far cry from the situation today, when Hibbard hardware is aggressively sold in nearly all parts of the United States, besides a considerable export business to Mexico, Cuba, Porto Rico, and South America.

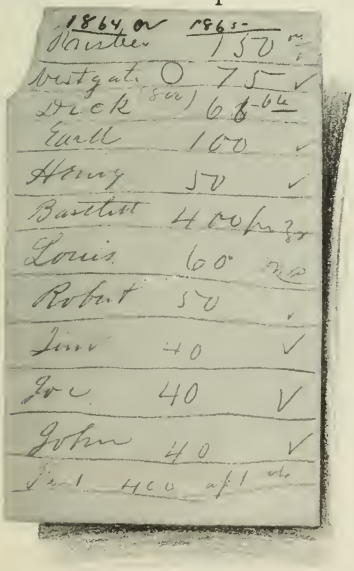
Tuttle, Hibbard & Co. had gone through a fire and panic, and Hibbard & Spencer were compelled to accept the shrinkage of values following the Civil War. But by 1867 their sales had

grown to such proportions that they moved from their Lake street quarters to a new store at 92-94 Michigan avenue, with double the previous floor space, and steam elevators. The business was beginning to hit its stride.

Chapter V

# Business Under Benevolent Autocracy

From the first, Mr. Hibbard had been the "big boss," and he continued to be that throughout his active years. He was a czar and did what he pleased without having to pause to hold conferences. His successors at the head of the business have likewise wielded a considerable degree of autocratic power. It is still the policy of the company to have power and responsibility go together in every department. Perhaps this has been an important element in the company's growth and success.



*Mr. Hibbard's Payroll*

Looking about at other successful enterprises, one finds much evidence that the man at the top should be able to speak with real authority. The United Steel Corporation prospered under the policy of picking one man and letting him be the boss. Henry Ford never truly came into his own until his domination of his busines was complete.

Since his word was law, Hibbard sometimes used his power in ways that were amazing and amusing—almost as if he were not merely the head of a business but patriarch of a tribe. If there appeared to be too many employes bearing the same name, and therefore possible confusion in pay-rolls or other records, Hibbard simply changed somebody's name to whatever struck his

fancy. If there were an excess of Frank Andersons, one of these might discover that he had become Frank Johnson. Two employes were named Fredericksen. Hibbard ordered that one of these, employed as a carpenter, should be known thenceforth, as Fred the Carpenter—though his first name was George. Soon the original name was lost in obscurity even in his home neighborhood. Sometimes Hibbard changed a name simply because it did not seem to him properly euphonious. Inasmuch as most of a man's friends were among his fellow employes, it was natural that he should come to be generally known by the name he went by at his work. In later years, a few of these arbitrary changes of names caused legal complications over questions of inheritance of property, and the courts had to decide whether the baptismal or the Hibbard nomenclature should determine the identity of heirs. One tangle arose from the fact that a man had property both in his original name and also in the one bestowed by Hibbard.

For a long time the business was so much under one-man direction that Hibbard carried the payroll on a little card always in his pocket. This list included a cashier and bookkeeper at $150 a month, salesmen at $75 and $100 a month, porters and packers at $40 a month. A. C. Bartlett, employed in the stock room, was later a member of the firm, but his name appears on this payroll for only $400 a year.

Like most autocrats, Hibbard was quick in his decisions. Sometimes these were a bit startling to the person most concerned. In the early days, a man came to apply for a job and chanced to see the head of the firm.

"What can you do?" asked Hibbard.

"Oh, I can do almost anything," replied the applicant.

"But tell me one definite thing you can do," persisted Hibbard.

"Well," declared the man, "I can do what I'm told."

"If you can do that," replied Hibbard quickly, "you're hired for life," Then, with a smile, he added: "And if you have a son who can do what he is told we'll take him on for life also."

This man actually did work for the company all the rest of his life and in due course his son took a job which proved to be equally secure.

Hibbard had a way of making himself personally agreeable to his employes. Back in the days when hours of work were longer than they are now—from 7 a. m. to 6 p. m. was an average day—it was sometimes necessary during the busy season for men in the warehouse to work at night. On such occasions, Hibbard used to stand at the front door as the men came out, holding a wash-basin filled with half dollars. He would hand to each man a coin, saying: "Now have a good supper." A half dollar *would* buy a good meal in those days.

When the number of employes was small it was customary for each man to go to a board just outside the office door, and write on a slip of cardboard his own time of arrival and departure for the day. Hibbard personally inspected that list each morning, running his finger up and down the board, and if anybody had arrived more than a few minutes after 7 a. m., he was likely to have a chat with the boss before the day was over.

After the firm had suffered from two or three bad fires, they installed what was then a great innovation—an electrical system for recording the visits of the night watchman over the building. If the watchman failed to insert his key with proper regularity at the various points intended for keeping tab on his activities, the omission was promptly noted in the office of a fire protection bureau. After telephones came into use, news of the watchman's dereliction reached Hibbard's home immediately. No matter what time of night it was, Hibbard called one of his sons to accompany him and they drove down to the store. This took nearly an hour, which gave Hibbard ample time to work up a proper degree of indignation toward the erring watchman. Usually he found the fellow sound asleep. Each time, he told the watchman that if he slept on duty again they would have to get along without each other. But my impression is that the watchman somehow held his job until old age forced his re-

tirement. When Hibbard died, the former watchman insisted upon offering a floral tribute—even though Mrs. Hibbard had requested that no flowers be sent by employes of the firm. (It was her wish that whatever money might have been used for flowers should go toward an endowed bed at St. Luke's Hospital for the company's employes.) But the former watchman sent a rather costly floral pillow bearing the words: *At Rest.* How Hibbard himself would have chuckled over the significance of those words from that watchman, whose life had been mainly devoted to trying to keep himself at rest.

Though a stickler for integrity in his employes, Hibbard always had a tender spot in his heart for the man who had done wrong, and always tried to find some way of excusing him. Yet he didn't always permit his soft-heartedness to carry him beyond bounds of common sense. His son Frank, then a mere youngster, working for the firm, once came into his office with a plea of sympathy for a man who had been caught thieving.

"Let's give him another chance," proposed Frank Hibbard. "The stuff he stole was worth about $50. He can gradually pay that back and probably will never do it again."

"By the way," said the father, changing the subject, "how are your own finances? Are you broke as usual?"

"The bank account is a bit low," confessed the son.

"Well, you've been doing good work and you can have $50 in advance on your wages." Whereupon he called to the cashier to give Frank a check.

"And now," resumed the father, "if you want to pay for what that fellow stole, you can contribute just as many dollars as you feel sorry for him."

"I found I didn't feel so sorry as I had a moment previous," observes Frank Hibbard, now chairman of the board of directors of Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co. "Father had his own way of teaching me a valuable lesson—that it is always easier to be benevolent with money not coming from one's own pocket."

All his life, Hibbard was reverential and true to strong religious convictions. He had daily family prayers and always laid aside a substantial sum from the company's earnings each year "to give back to the Lord."

"The Lord has been good to us this year," he would say, "and we must see that he receives a just share." This appropriation, which varied according to the amount of earnings, was used for aiding churches and other charities. Even to the present time, the company still follows the policy of setting aside part of the annual earnings for helping worthy causes.

In his later years, Hibbard developed a habit of thinking in multiples of seven. The real reason was doubtless that he had six sons and daughters and a wife, making seven heirs. When he bought stocks or bonds, he usually bought seven of the same kind and tucked them away in his safety deposit box. He was that thoughtful—anxious to have his heirs not only benefit from his life's labors after he was gone, but benefit simply and easily. This seven idea was so often on his mind that his business associates used to tell him, jokingly, that he would have liked to buy and sell everything in sets of seven instead of by the dozen.

Chapter VI

# Chicago Has a Fire

Hibbard's practice of handling a situation in his own way once came near causing direful results. The firm's place of business on Michigan Avenue, to which they had moved in 1867, was near a base-ball park, and the roof of the building afforded an excellent reserved space from which to view the games. Hibbard, on returning to the store one afternoon to note how things




*Saving Sample Boards*

looked after some remodeling and enlargements of space just completed, found the place almost entirely deserted. Everybody had gone to the roof to watch the final innings of one of the closing ball games of the season. Hibbard quietly climbed up a steep flight of steps leading to a trap-door, through which the

crowd had gone to the roof, and locked the door! He let the crowd remain on the roof until long after the ball game was over. Then he nearly forgot about them and by the merest chance returned to unlock that trap-door and release his prisoners. It was a lucky thing that he happened to remember them, for that very night a big fire broke out and the building was destroyed, along with hundreds of other buildings. Two hundred and fifty people were killed and nearly 100,000 left destitute. It was a big fire—in fact, one of the most successful fires in history—the great Chicago fire that started on that night of Saturday, October 7, 1871!

Hibbard lost heavily enough in property, but his worries were probably trivial compared with those he had so barely escaped. I doubt if he would have felt entirely comfortable if he hadn't remembered in the nick of time to let those men down from the roof.

Right here it may be remarked that many of the older employes of Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co., who recall vividly the events of the fire, seriously doubt if the cause was Mrs. O'Leary's cow kicking over a lamp. It is not entirely authenticated that Mrs. O'Leary even kept a cow. Many declare that she always bought her milk.

One is reminded here of the story, in Frank O'Brien's history of the New York *Sun,* of the telegraph editor who, after taking the account of the fire off the wire for several hours, without making any comment on the disaster, finally, about 3 o'clock in the morning, stretched himself and remarked, with a yawn: "Quite a fire in Chicago!"

By desperate efforts, Hibbard & Spencer were able to save the firm's books and records and also their sample boards containing most of the smaller items sold. Sample boards with various articles fastened to them for display purposes are common in hardware stores today, but Hibbard & Spencer were probably the first to use them. Having these samples in a convenient form proved to be of the greatest importance after the fire, for they

furnished the handiest possible record of the number, price, and name of the maker of each article needed.

Since two-thirds of Chicago was built of wood and practically all these buildings burned, it was not easy to find a suitable space right offhand in which to house a wholesale hardware stock. Hibbard had a comfortable, big home of brick and stone at number 1701, a fashionable part of Prairie avenue, and it was there that the firm made their temporary headquarters. The original fire had started on Saturday night. Soon after midnight Sunday, Hibbard's home was open not only to his firm, for whatever use might be necessary, but for all friends whose families needed shelter. Drayloads of women, children and furniture kept passing the house. The Hibbard houshold, offering all the hospitality at their command, didn't know what minute they, too, might find it imperative to move on. While many unexpected guests were sleeping in improvised beds, or on the floor, an anxious mother sat in watchful waiting with emergency rations of clothing for four little girls (packed in quilts tied together by the four corners) in readiness for a forced move. But the fire did not reach that far and early on Tuesday morning Hibbard & Spencer were ready to sell Hibbard hardware right from the home of the founder of the business. That day they sent out the following letter, prepared by A. C. Bartlett, later a member of the firm:

*Chicago, Oct. 10th, 1871.*

*Dear Sir:*

*In the terrible calamity that has overtaken our thriving City, we have suffered severely. Nearly our entire stock of goods is in ashes, and yet we have great reason to sincerely thank God for the preservation of our lives, and the solvency of our firm. In the past, we have endeavored by promptness and fair treatment of our customers to merit and receive the patronage of the hardware trade. We shall redouble our energies in the future.*

*We have now a great personal favor to ask of each of our many friends, and of the trade throughout the Northwest, viz: that those who are indebted to us will remit with the least possible delay, and that you will favor us with your orders for goods. We have a remnant of our stock from which we shall ship as far as possible, in perfect order, and the balance of your memorandum will be sent to New York, where two of our firm are engaged in filling orders and forwarding goods, with the UTMOST DISPATCH. We shall make prices cheap, and allow you difference in freight when goods are shipped from New York. Hoping to make it to your advantage to grant this great favor, and assuring you that it will be appreciated, we remain,*

*Yours truly,*

*HIBBARD & SPENCER.*

Similar notices went briefly by telegraph. Before breakfast an order had arrived, from a former employe; and before the day was over, carloads of goods were on their way from New York and Milwaukee. Hibbard & Spencer were already rebuilding their business. Because they had made a reputation for fair dealing and dependability, their credit rating, even with their business in ashes, was still A-1, and this was a big help. Mr. Bartlett, who went to New York to look after buying goods, was able to gain big price concessions from manufacturers, for cash. The sellers did not believe that the hardware company, with their plant in ashes, would be able to raise the cash—but every bill was promptly discounted. Perhaps the fire was a blessing in disguise, for never had so many tools and builders' hardware been needed all at once in one city before. The population of Chicago, that had been only 80,000 in 1855, when the business was started, was now more than 334,000. In spite of the fire, Chicago was already a great city.



*The Old Hibbard Residence*

With carpets removed from the library and living rooms at 1701, and desks installed, the encroachment of business on domestic arrangements began. As goods arrived, more and more of the home had to be used for office and storage, and this was true even though the stable, too, was jammed with hardware, as was also a large shed hastily erected on what had been a lawn and flower garden. All the more expensive hardware was kept in the house. The drawing room space not filled with desks was used for storing cutlery. Even the attic was used. In the basement, only the laundry and refrigerator rooms remained private property. Part of the kitchen might have been seized for storage purposes, but it had another business use, for busy clerks had no time to go home or elsewhere for lunch, and had to be fed on the premises. Perhaps more than ever before, it became evident that Gold Hibbard had chosen wisely when he picked his first partner—his life partner, I mean. Mrs. Hibbard not only looked upon the experience of having her home turned topsy-turvy as an adventure, and made everybody in the house comfortable, but had time to take coffee and other supplies each day to sufferers who had been completely wiped out.

Every lounge, sofa and spare bed in the house was needed for clerks who were also working in shifts to help guard the Illinois Central Railroad tracks, the route mostly used by tramps and marauders coming to the city to steal whatever they could. The hardware clerks, when on duty as guardians, carried out with them a supply of butcher knives and devoted part of their time to sharpening these on the rails—just for the moral effect of giving out the impression that if occasion arose the sharpened knives might be used in battle.

Pillagers were often emboldened by the disorganized conditions immediately after the fire to pick up what they could, even if property owners were near. While the fire at the Michigan avenue store was still smouldering, Mr. Hibbard attempted to remonstrate with a gang of hoodlums who were carrying away everything they could, but they hooted at him and were about to retaliate with personal violence when a powerful man driving a team jumped down from his wagon seat to come to the rescue. It was a time "when a feller needed a friend," and Hibbard felt so grateful for his vigorous aid, that he hired the man on the spot to quit driving a team and come to work for Hibbard & Spencer. The man stayed in the employ of the hardware firm all the rest of his life.

Not long before the fire, Hibbard's old friend, Andrew D. White, had visited the firm's store and was much impressed by the great number of immense chains and chain cables on one floor, and with the number, size and variety of bells on the floor above—church bells, locomotive bells, steamboat bells, farm bells, almost every conceivable kind of bell. Shortly after the fire, White again visited Chicago and was curious to know what became of all those chains and bells.

"They all got melted and tangled up together," Hibbard told him. "We couldn't waste time trying to do anything with them, or with hauling them away; so we dug big well holes, deep down under the old foundation, and buried them right where they were." Then he laughed heartily and added: "Some day, maybe hundreds of years from now, archeologists will dig up that mass of melted bells and chains and will evolve all sorts of untenable theories as to how they got there. And it will be a huge joke on them, for they will never find out the truth."

The makeshift of keeping store in the Hibbard home did not last long, for within less than a week after the fire, the floor was being laid in a temporary, one-story building, 100 by 300, on ground now called Grant Park, on the lake front. The following Summer, they moved into a new building at 30-32 Lake

street—the same location they had occupied once before. This store was about the same size as the one destroyed and was soon hopelessly inadequate for a business so rapidly growing. The firm rented adjoining space until they were using all the buildings from 16 to 32 Lake street, besides a large warehouse on Michigan avenue. Soon they outgrew this warehouse also and




*The Fourth Store*

built a new one with five floors and a basement, fronting on the river. Still the business kept overflowing its space. They added balconies, but even then there was scarcely room to keep an extra chair to offer to a visiting customer. In 1893, the World's Fair—the World's Columbian Exposition—made Chicago famous all over the world. The population had grown to a million and a half, and the building boom that came with the fair created a demand for builders' supplies that made the boom after the big fire seem comparatively trivial.

Crowded as they were, the firm remained at the Lake street corner for 31 years, until they moved, in 1903—the year of Mr. Hibbard's death—into an immense ten-story, fireproof building at State street bridge. The old building where they spent 31 years of their growth still remains, though in another

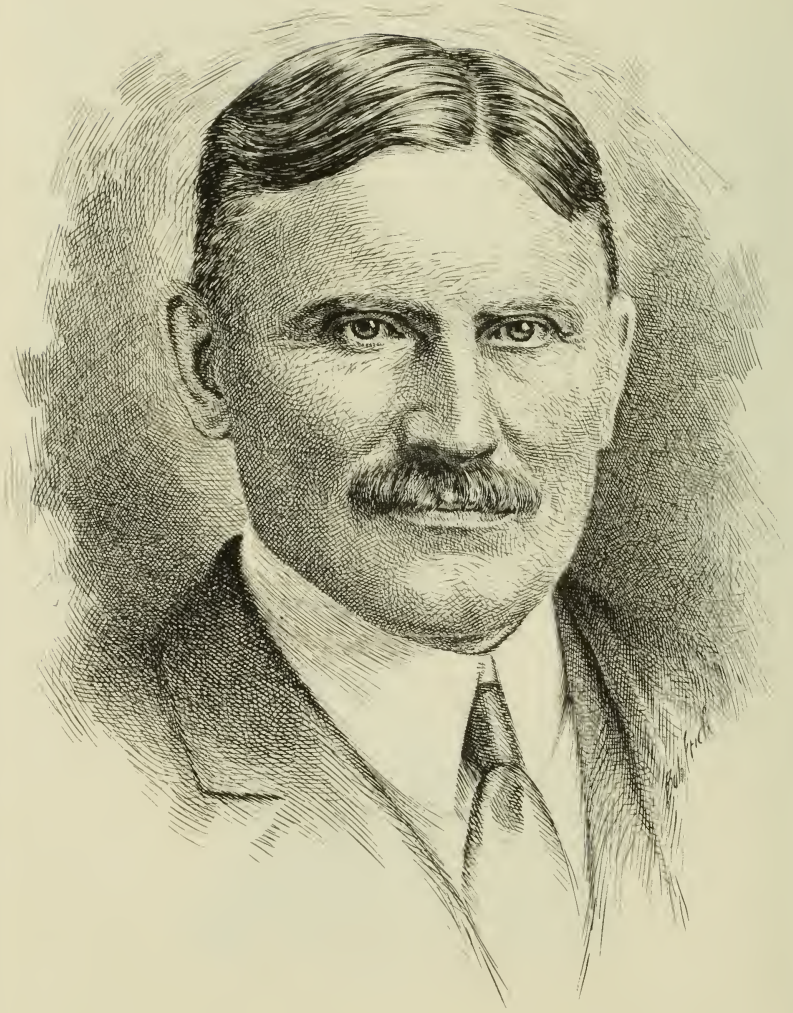
form, for after a wrecking company had torn it down, the lumber was used, I believe, in the attractive Kimball building at Jackson boulevard and Wabash avenue, and the brick was worked over into a skyscraper at South Water and Clark streets.

Since 1868 it had been the policy of the firm to let certain of the more capable employes share in profits, and in 1877, interests of junior members of the organization were increased. The firm became Hibbard, Spencer & Co. It was in January, 1882, that the name of Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co. came into being. The officers were: William G. Hibbard, president and treasurer; F. F. Spencer, vice-president; A. C. Bartlett, secretary; Charles H. Conover and J. W. Nye, directors. After the death of Mr. Spencer in 1890, Mr. Hibbard continued as president, Mr. Bartlett became vice-president, and Mr. Conover, secretary. Following the death of Mr. Hibbard in 1903, Mr. Bartlett became president and Mr. Conover vice-president.

In succeeding chapters we shall become better acquainted with Mr. Bartlett, Mr. Conover and others who kept the sturdy old ship moving steadily forward.



*The Fifth Store*



Adolphus Clay Bartlett

Chapter VII

# Why Three Names Still Live

That three boys who grew up in the same part of western New York, should become acquainted in later years in Chicago and form a highly successful partnership is a sample of the quirks of Destiny that make life interesting. These three men, Hibbard, Spencer, and Bartlett, all from the same locality, formed a great trio. Each man not only had unusual qualifications supplementing those of his partners, but also was capable of team work. Perhaps partly because of their common background, they attained a degree of harmony and co-operation that was an example to everybody about them.

Mr. Hibbard, an exceptionally shrewd judge of values, always did most of the buying. Mr. Spencer continued to be the credit man, and Mr. Bartlett looked after the selling, as well as the management of affairs in the building itself. He was among the first to think of organizing a sales force to go out on the road to call on the trade. To him is due in great measure the successful building up of the elaborate sales system that Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co. have developed. In the earlier period of his partnership, Mr. Bartlett handled all orders, and all correspondence in connection with sales work. He personally copied into a book every order that came in.

The outstanding characteristic of A. C. Bartlett that his old associates all mention was his capacity for hard work. For years, he put in longer hours than anybody else about the place. Mr. Spencer always came down early in the morning to pass on credits of orders and get them started. Mr. Hibbard came down later, but never liked to go home until the last horn was blown. Mr. Bartlett, being the junior partner, felt that he should be

down as early in the morning as Mr. Spencer and stay as late as Mr. Hibbard. He actually did that year after year. One of his special abilities was in the preparation of simple, vigorous unstereotyped business letters—such as the one that the firm sent out just after the great Chicago fire. He could express himself well and forcibly without wasting needless words.

Adolphus Clay Bartlett was born in Stratford, New York, but after his father's death went with his mother to live in the town of Salisbury where he continued his schooling. Later he attended Danville Academy and studied for two years at Liberal Institute, Clinton, New York. He taught school for a short time and got his first business training as clerk in a general store. At the age of 19, he set out for Chicago and obtained a job with Tuttle, Hibbard & Co. His first duties were to dust the shelves where tinware was kept—a properly humble start for a man who was going to become successively sales manager, secretary, director, vice-president, president, and finally, in 1914, the first to occupy the newly-created office of chairman of the board of directors, the position he held at the time of his death, in 1922.

Early in his career with the hardware firm, Bartlett began to set his aim high. Willing to work, he saw no reason why he should not aspire to become a member of the firm. But he did not mention this to Hibbard or Spencer until he had made himself so useful and had his name so well established in the hardware trade that his requests for recognition could not well be ignored. The story is that he went to Mr. Hibbard and asked that his name should "go on the sign." He added that if his name didn't go on *that* sign, it would go on another. Mr. Hibbard decided that the young man was far too valuable to let go elsewhere and added his name to the masthead of the rapidly growing business.

Bartlett was serious-minded and liked young men who craved success and were willing to work for it. In a statement he once prepared, he said: "If the young men when coming into the house fully realize how much their advancement and ultimate

welfare and success depend upon their thoroughness, diligence, loyalty and integrity, their futures are assured, for with that realization no one of intelligence can deliberately throw away his opportunities."

One young man, still in his teens, now the head of an important department, crashed the gate years ago and by chance made his way to the office of Mr. Bartlett to apply for a job.

"I'll send you down to the employment manager," Bartlett told him, "and perhaps he can find a place for you."

"I'd rather just deal with you," said the applicant. "Suppose we arrange it in this way: If there's a job available, I'm to have it, but if none is open right now, then I'll work for nothing at any odd job, no matter what, until there *is* an opening. Then, you see, I'll be here on hand ready to take the job."

In later years, after the young man had become a vital cog in the organization, Bartlett felt personal pride in having been wise enough not to let that applicant go away jobless.

Feeling a kinship for true toilers, Bartlett must have been rudely shocked one day in conversation with a certain young man who had recently entered the firm's employ. This young man, scion of a wealthy family, was just out of an eastern college where he had gained a reputation as a fashion plate. He took a job with the hardware company not so much because he craved a business career, as because his family had induced him to do so. Just as he was receiving his pay envelope on the first Saturday night of his employment, he chanced to come face to face with Mr. Bartlett who greeted him cordially.

"You must be feeling proud," suggested Bartlett, "to know that you're now earning your own upkeep."

"Oh, I'm feeling so-so," replied the young man, in a noncommittal tone.

"And how much money have you earned this week?" asked Bartlett.

"They've just handed me $4," replied the new employe.

"What do you plan to do with this first money you have earned?" further inquired Bartlett.

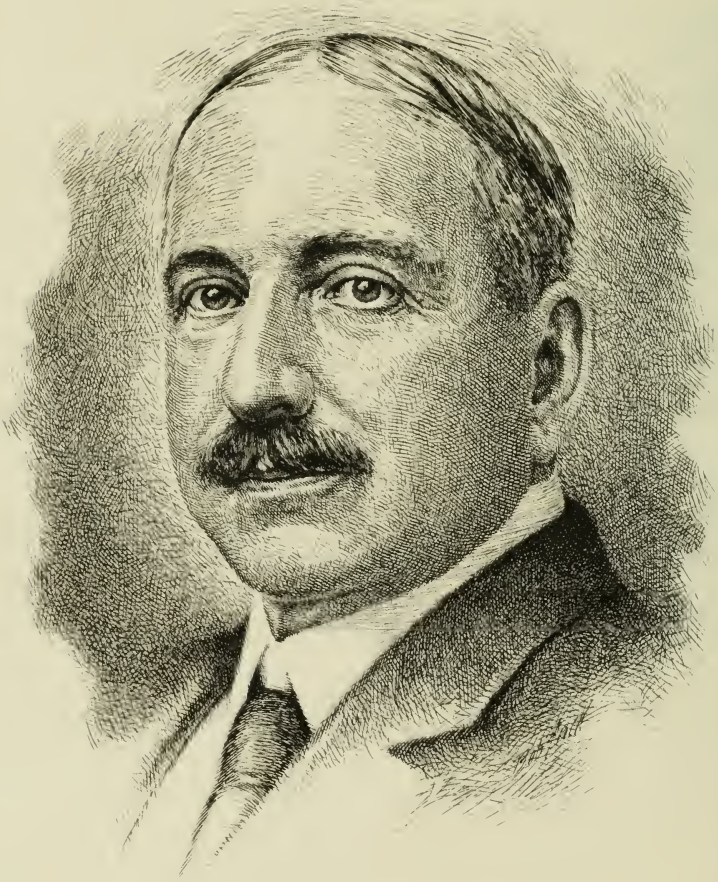
"I think," said the young man, "that I'll put another dollar to it and go out tonight and buy myself a bottle of wine!"

Because of his irrepressible energy, Bartlett, after expending much thought and effort in his own business, still had time to devote to other enterprises, business, civic, charitable and educational. He had an especial enthusiasm for the Chicago Home for the Friendless, of which he was president for more than thirty-five years.

He served as a member of the Chicago Board of Education, president of the Commercial Club, director of the Relief and Aid Society, director of the Art Institute, First National Bank, First Trust and Savings Bank, The Northern Trust Co., Old People's Home, and Beloit College, and was Trustee of the University of Chicago.

During the latter years of his life, he became much interested in the development of the country about Phoenix, Ariz., and spent much of his time in the Southwest. Years ago he became one of the founders and first vice-president of the Chicago Sunday Evening Club, known today all over the United States because of its country-wide radio audience.

Three genuine human beings, Hibbard, Spencer, and Bartlett, each one fond of his fellow members of the human race and ever willing to lend a helping hand in any worthy enterprise. It isn't surprising that they were successful in handling commodities to meet the growing variety of human demands.



Charles Hopkins Conover

Chapter VIII

# Those Who Carried On

Perhaps the most colorful personality that ever dominated the affairs of Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co. was Charles Hopkins Conover, last of the czars. Of small stature, he had been handicapped during the earlier part of his business career by a secret feeling of inferiority. Perhaps this became the true explanation of his later success, since it may have been the reason why he never quit trying to improve himself. All his life he was a student, with a passion for thoroughness. Nothing less than complete mastery of a subject satisfied him.

As a young business man, he was inclined to shrink from assuming new responsibilities. He often appealed to his superior officer to handle important work that he might well have looked upon as opportunity for himself. He was in no sense a shirk, but simply under-estimated his own abilities. Gradually, however, he became willing to accept more and more leadership. Endowed with a superior type of mind, it finally became evident even to himself that he was capable of exercising good judgment. Then, in contrast with his earlier feeling of inferiority and hesitation about asserting himself, he developed an ability for making instantaneous decisions and of carrying them out with amazing vigor. To the end of his life, however, he continued to be sensitive about his small stature and though his associates usually referred to him with affection and respect as "the little man," they were careful never to do this within his hearing. All loved him for his keen and unwavering sense of justice, even though his manner of administering it was often stern and severe.

Having come to have faith in himself, Conover acquired a broad-gauge, long range view of business and thought always of the future. This gave him success as a buyer. Falling prices never worried him. One of his favorite statements was: "They can't reduce prices faster than I can buy goods." In the late 90's, a price war occurred among nail manufacturers and nails sold as low as 50 cents a keg. Every time prices fell, Conover bought more nails. After every spare bit of his firm's warehouse space was occupied by nail kegs, he began to rent storage space wherever it was cheap. It was said that he had nails in nearly every basement along Lake street. When the manufacturers finally got together and raised the price of nails $1 a keg overnight, Conover had in stock for Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co. nearly *one million* kegs of nails! Likewise, just before the formation of the tin plate trust, which caused a big advance in prices, Conover had hundreds of carloads of tinware stored all over town.

In arriving at prices, Conover followed direct methods. A salesman, representing one of the biggest manufacturers of locks, came to see him regarding an order for a new lock set. Conover told him to come back the next day. He then made him an offer that caused the salesman to gasp.

"You're within exactly one penny of the price I had expected to ask you," said the astonished salesman.

It was not mere chance that had enabled Conover to arrive so accurately at a fair price. He had taken apart the salesman's sample lock, and placed the various little pieces of brass, steel and iron on a jewelry scale that he kept on his desk. Knowing exactly how much of each kind of material was in the lock, he could estimate with precision what the manufacturing cost and a decent profit should be. That was Conover!

Conover was born on July 12th, 1847, at Easton, Pa., but at the age of 12 went with his parents to live in Buffalo, N. Y., the same geographical area that had produced, Hibbard, Spencer, and Bartlett. Hence that western New York influence once

again exerted itself on the future prosperity of the firm. It was in Buffalo that Conover made his first business connection, with the wholesale hardware firm of Pratt & Company, at the age of 18. This firm proved to be a great training school for thoroughness. After he had acquired a first rate knowledge of the hardware business and his employers considered him competent to represent them among customers, they sent him into the Wisconsin territory as salesman, and his work was successful. Later they brought him back to the main office for more responsible duties.



*State Street Store . . . the Sixth*

Shortly before the great Chicago fire, in 1871, Mr. Hibbard employed Mr. Conover to assist him in buying goods. Not long afterward, Conover directed a newly organized purchasing department. Though he had been a successful salesman, he was even better as a buyer and it was always in that branch of the business that his native shrewdness was most conspicuous. Almost from the day of Conover's connection with Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co. the goods they handled began to grow both in volume and variety. When the firm was incorporated in

1882, Conover became a member of the first board of directors, consisting of five stockholders. He became secretary of the company in 1890, following Mr. Spencer's death, and was made vice-president in 1904. For some time before Mr. Bartlett's resignation as president, to become chairman of the board of directors in 1914, Mr. Bartlett had been giving the reins over to Conover. His actual term as president was short, for he died suddenly, November 4, 1915, in his 69th year.

Throughout his life, Conover was a great reader. For years he had a standing order in one of the Chicago bookstores to send him any book in which they thought he might be interested. He read thoughtfully, too. Comparatively late in life, he discovered that books which interested him were often cluttered up with Latin words and phrases that he couldn't understand. Once again his old feeling of inadequacy had prodded him. Busy as he was, at the age of 60, he took up the study of Latin, that he might translate those quotations when they blocked his reading paths. His reading covered a wide range and he was especially well grounded in biography and history. He was much interested, by the way, in the Chicago Historical Society and was at one time, I believe, its president. Having a keen mind that could instantly take in all sides of a question, his reading not only sharpened his mental faculties but also made him an exceptionally charming and entertaining conversationalist. He had a gift for friendship, too, and after he had ceased to do much buying, he continued to buy certain lines of goods just to keep up his contact with old friends who came to sell.

Like many men who are stern and czar-like in business, Conover always showed a delightful personality in his own home where he was not only loved by members of his family but wellnigh worshipped. He was a well-rounded character. As A. C. Bartlett used to say of him after years of intimate association:

"His work rather than his voice proclaimed the value of his efforts."



John Joseph Charles

Mr. Conover's successor as president was J. J. Charles, who had started to work for the company as a boy, back in 1873. One of his first jobs had been that of city buyer. In the earlier days of the company, the city buyer drove about with a horse and wagon to pick up goods needed from the various other jobbers in town and also from manufacturers' stocks. His duties included looking after the horse that he drove. Surely there was nothing about the job of currying or bedding down a horse to suggest becoming president of a great corporation—unless it was that Charles always did a good job. The horse invariably looked well cared for.

For a time, Charles was on the road for the company as salesman and then returned to the main office to serve, for many years, as buyer. He was extremely conservative by nature and his innate sense of caution was of the utmost value to the company during the war years and the period of deflation that followed. In 1921, when a period of drastic readjustment of values became necessary, to the great distress of many wholesale houses, Mr. Charles had the stocks on hand so low that the company could meet new conditions without serious hardship. He had foreseen, sooner than most executives, that an inevitable day of reckoning would come.




*North Pier Warehouse.*

Meeting the special conditions of personnel management during the war period, when practically every male employe of military age who could go, went into uniform, was another unusual

job that Charles managed with rare good judgment. Women were employed in place of young men wherever possible, even as order clerks and elevator operators; and men of advanced age were fitted with scientific care to those jobs where experience rather than agility was the prime essential. It also fell to Mr. Charles to fit all old employes back into their former jobs when they returned from military service.

Throughout the war period, and thereafter, new problems arose almost daily, and Charles handled them all with wisdom. The worries of one problem in particular, to be discussed in a later chapter, probably hastened his death, in 1926.

Mr. Charles was succeeded by C. J. Whipple, who had been closely associated with him as vice-president. Son of C. B. Whipple, who had been confidential secretary to A. C. Bartlett, and later secretary of the company, Whipple had been in touch with Hibbard hardware almost as far back as his memory goes.

Whipple was educated as an engineer, and became the head of the company at a time when the engineering type of mind was especially useful. Earlier in the company's history, before the era of scientific precision in business, an engineer in command might have been a foolish luxury; but John Whipple had the good fortune to be in line for promotion at the very time when the kind of work he was fitted to do was most needed.

Chapter IX

# Old Things Pass Away

Once a business is well established, it might be comparatively easy to keep it going successfully by the simple process of doing the same things that were done in the beginning. The great trouble with this plan is that it won't work. Since the essence of human life is change, business requirements do not stand still. Perhaps one reason why father and son when in business together are seldom in full accord is because of the inevitable changes that have come with the passing of the years from one generation to the next. He who grew up under the older order is sometimes slow to recognize the new.

In the hardware business, changes have been especially drastic. Scores of lines of goods, once of major importance to annual profits, have either ceased to exist or become negligible. The hardware dealer has literally seen a vast volume of business pulled right out from under him.

As recently as 20 years ago, at least one item out of every four that Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co. sold had to do with a horse, wagon, harness or buggy. But today even the names of various articles pertaining to horse-drawn vehicles have almost passed from the English language. One day recently, when twitted about the acoustic properties of a tweed suit I was wearing, I said: "Wait until you see it with the hames and martingales!" But my joke went to waste, for not one of my hearers would have known hames and martingales by name when they saw them. Many other items of hardware once a part of our daily lives are today little more than a memory. Collars, straps, buckles, snaps, halters and chains, flynets, clevises, wagon body rods, rivets, and other accessories, have largely gone

the way of pug dogs and congress shoes. If the passing of the horse had been the only change toward modern conditions, hardware dealers might have found themselves sailing calm seas under cloudless skies. But there came times when it must have appeared to a hardware man as if *most* of the things he used to sell had become obsolete. One item after another had suffered from a modern foe. Even pocketknives have been hit somewhat by the mechanical pencil, which doesn't require sharpening. Moreover, men don't seem to sit about and whittle as they once did. They have too much else to occupy them.

Almost coincident with the fade-out of the horse came the farewell to the kerosene lamp and all that went with it. Some 25 years ago, one-half of one floor in the Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett plant was devoted to lamp goods and lanterns — stable lanterns, household lamps, overhead lamps, cleverly contrived with chains for lowering or raising them, lamps and lanterns in a variety of shapes and sizes. The wick and chimney business alone was considerable. Today the company still carries a few lamps and lanterns but the volume of such business is a mere trifle. Electric-lighted homes and pocket flash-lights for out-of-doors have made the change.

All along the line it is the same story of changing modes of life, new ways of doing ordinary things, obsolescence of items once daily essentials. Combine harvesters have cut into the sale of steel forks and other farm tools. Concrete and steel have greatly reduced the consumption of nails. Because of the vast amount of preparation of building material at the mill, even to the boring of holes, fewer carpenter tools are needed. In the early days, by the way, nearly all mechanics' tools were imported from England. Desperate efforts were necessary to induce people to buy tools made in America — even though they were nearly all made at first by enterprising tool-makers who had immigrated here from England. Today, however, American mechanics' tools are everywhere recognized as the best.

The vogue of ready-made clothing has reduced the amount of home sewing. Hibbard hardware dealers used to sell thousands of dozens of pairs of scissors and shears each year, but today the sales are a mere fraction of what they were. The blacksmith is passing and with him all the items that he used to buy from hardware companies. Likewise the tin shop is all but extinct. Before the days of better public laundries and stationary washtubs or washing machines in the home, the local tinner did a big business making wash boilers for household use; and, as already noted, he bought copper for the bottoms, as well as the tin itself, from hardware companies. The copper boiler business had practically ceased until recent years when a slight revival was noted. Today grave rumors are sometimes circulated that an occasional new copper boiler sold by a God-fearing hardware dealer eventually finds its way into use more or less associated with the making of so-called home brew. But these reports are doubtless ill-founded and persons who circulate such stories must have very little to do.

Along with wash boilers has gone part of the tinware that once went to the dairying industry. Tank cars for carrying milk have supplanted thousands of cans.

Central heating has hurt the stove business. Gas stoves and gas furnaces have reduced the rate of wear on stovepipes.

The biggest sales outlet for shotguns has always been boys growing up on farms. Today, with families on farms fewer and smaller, even though city people have more leisure for hunting and trapshooting, shotgun sales in the last 20 years have barely held their own. At the same time, despite a seeming increase in lawlessness, sales of revolvers and pistols have greatly fallen off.

Automobile traffic has killed off the bicycle business. Even one who might care to risk bicycling on the public highway can buy a used car for less than the price of a bicycle. By the way, who remembers when bicycles such as the Stearns or Columbia brought $125 apiece, equipped with Morgan & Wright, Palmer, or Dunlop tires!

Wooden ware, once much used in home kitchens, is today not only in less demand, but more difficult to handle, because of the danger of being damaged by warping in modern well-heated warehouse buildings.

Even the old-fashioned metal cuspidor, once handled by hardware companies in carload lots, is now less often seen except in antique shops. After interior decorators got in their devastating work, there arose a feeling, now widespread, that the cuspidor, however useful, is not truly ornamental, and no longer essential in a well-appointed home.

Besides all the articles no longer used, many of the smaller items, at one time sold only in hardware stores, are today available at the five-and-ten.

It is not surprising that many of the less imaginative hardware dealers have grown discouraged and said:

"No use staying in the business. Everything we ever sold in hardware stores is either no longer needed or sold elsewhere."

But of course all this was just the seeming rather than the real. The truth is evident when we consider that Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co. started to build up their business with only about 2,000 different items and today they handle 60,000 separate and distinct articles!



Frank Hibbard

Chapter X

# Meeting the New Era

Just as Scotland is said to produce the best gardeners in the world—since the rocky soil is so disadvantageous that only a capable gardener can survive—adverse conditions in business are certain to engender more painstaking effort and more scientific knowledge. Indeed, whether in an individual or a corporation, it is adversity that breeds character. Men become clever and capable in proportion to the difficulties they learn to overcome. The hardware business was never conducted so carefully, or so successfully, as since a changing world began to force more rapid adjustments to new situations. Intelligence might be defined as the ability to solve new and unexpected problems. Hardware men have become better business men than ever before because they have *had* to be.

Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co., compelled to carry on their business more scientifically, have made a number of important discoveries. One of these is that it is not profitable to sell an article for less than it costs. This may seem so elementary a bit of business knowledge that one might expect almost anybody to know it. But the surprising fact is that many great corporations have come to grief by not knowing the actual cost of selling each article on their lists. The man who sells an article for $2 more than it costs him, but regularly spends more than $2 worth of time in inducing his customer to buy it, will never become a Napoleon of commerce. Such transactions occur more often than one might think. Not long ago I happened to be in a hardware store when a clerk proudly announced to his boss: "I finally sold that man a cultivator—been working on him for the last three months."

"Yes," replied the proprietor, "but that little girl over there has just sold a woman a set of golf clubs in less than five minutes and made more money on them than you did on the cultivator."

It must be obvious that the only way a big selling organization can be just to all its customers is to guard against charging one too much and another too little. If one is charged too little, another *must* be charged more than his share, else the seller couldn't stay in business. Hence knowing costs is only *fair play.*

Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co. know that the minimum cost for direct labor, including clerical work on each item of any order, is 21 cents. It doesn't matter whether the item is a fishhook or a farm implement; the minimum expense for handling it is the same. They know, too, that the cost of packing up a lamp chimney is nearly as much as for packing a dozen. One day, the head of the firm learned that several lamp chimneys had been deliberately broken and thrown out. He personally went to investigate such wastefulness.

"We found," reported the man who had done the breaking, "that it would cost more to pack these two or three odd chimneys than they were worth. I didn't want to carry them off myself, so the logical thing to do was to break them. Hereafter we'll handle chimneys as they come from the manufacturers in boxes of one dozen."

Out of that episode grew a painstaking investigation as to the smallest number of various kinds of articles that could properly be handled at a price fair to the customer.

Sometimes a customer complains: "You won't sell me less than six and I need only two."

To which the wholesaler retorts: "Any small useful article of which you can't sell six isn't properly displayed in your store or isn't worth the space it occupies."

Obviously, it costs the wholesaler more than it does a retailer to handle a small item, because in a wholesale house *several*

people are involved in handling each order, but a retailer can pass it direct to his customer.

No detail is too small to be approached with scientific care. Companies which sell on a large scale by mail, know almost the exact percentage that their sales are increased by having the index to their catalog in the middle of the book rather than at the front or rear. When a customer must hunt for the index, he has opportunity to see pictures and prices of various articles that may catch his fancy.



*Hibbard's Model Retail Store*

Attention to a thousand minor details, designed to benefit their customer as much as themselves, has enabled Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co. to gain more and more satisfied customers each year. Like other wholesale dealers they have learned, too, that they can be prosperous only when their customers, the retail hardware men, are doing well. For this reason, they have devoted much thought and attention to helping customers to conduct their stores more profitably. Here again countless small details are of the utmost importance. Scientific management has taught us, for example, that seven feet is as high as any shelf should be in a retail shop—because that is as high as a clerk can reach without using a chair or a stepladder. It isn't that the clerk minds the extra exertion of stepping upon

a chair to reach an article asked for. The point is that the *customer* minds it. When the customer has to put the clerk to extra trouble, then he feels an obligation to buy the article the clerk has lifted down from the top shelf. Rather than feel such an obligation, the customer is likely not to ask to see an item out of reach.

The clerk in a well-regulated hardware store knows today that it is unwise to beguile a customer into buying what he doesn't want. Perhaps a customer desires to buy a cheap hammer, knowing that he has use for one now, but may never need it again. If the clerk induces him to buy a high-priced hammer, no better for the purpose required than a cheap one, the immediate transaction may be profitable but it doesn't help to build up that kind of good will which makes the customer wish to return again and again.

One's memory doesn't need to go far back to recall the days when most of the articles in a hardware store were out of sight and a customer could not buy much without the aid of a clerk. Today in a really modern store, nearly everything is in sight, with prices plainly marked and the customer can look after himself almost as well as in a cafeteria. It used to be that courtesy required the clerk or proprietor to follow a customer all the way from the rear of the store to the front door, in case the customer should think of anything else he desired to see. Today the clever retailer knows that it is wiser to let the customer walk to the front door unaccompanied. The customer prefers not to have any clerk nearby, for then it is possible for him to have the fun of looking at various articles he passes, without any obligation to buy. Thus feeling comfortable, he is more likely to buy something than if a clerk were along.

I heard recently of a hardware store conducted by a father and son. In the absence of his father, the son had installed modern fixtures and what the father called crazy new-fangled methods. While they were arguing one day about present-day business practices, a customer came in, unobserved, picked out

something he wanted, laid the exact change on the counter and walked out. The father looked at the son, astonished. Here was a demonstration of the very thing the son had been trying to prove, and the father thenceforth submitted gracefully to new ideas. It may not be good for a clerk's vanity to see a customer wait on himself unassisted, but he can probably draw better wages than ever, for the boss may have bigger profits out of which to pay him.

Chain stores, though they have offered the keenest kind of competition in many lines, have been a not unmixed blessing, for they have forced many storekeepers to do their jobs better. When an independent retailer manages his business as well as the chain store does, he should make more money than if he were merely a unit in the chain—for he has less expense. He is not not contributing his share of the cost of supervisors, store checkers, inventory checkers and auditors. He is his *own* supervisor.

Apart from all the improvement in methods forced into the hardware business by stern necessity, business has advanced on a vast scale in certain lines while other items have passed into what Grover Cleveland called innocuous desuetude. Just now we are in an era of color. More paint is used than at any time in the world's history. People paint their homes, inside and out, more frequently than ever before. Yet paint sales have not even pierced the surface of their possibilities. It is estimated that only about one-fifth of the areas that need paint each year, actually are painted. In other words, if paint sales were doubled, it might still be possible to double them again. Kitchen ware now comes in cheerful colors. Even garden tools have color schemes. For some time now, sales of paint, as well as of various articles that are bought partly to display cheerful colors, have annually gone well ahead of the previous year. The color era is here.

Toys, which were practically unheard of in hardware stores a few years ago, have now become an item of tremendous importance. As people have come into this present era of greater

wealth, and more income in the families of wage earners than the world has ever known before, men have naturally begun to think more about luxuries. Children who in an earlier period of our economic history would have been expected to contribute earnings to the family income, are today chief beneficiaries of the family surplus. Hardware dealers have lost the sale of a variety of goods that accompanied the horse. But thousands of families spend more annually on toys alone than would have bought a horse and buggy.

Perhaps the householder who no longer buys an axe or a cross-cut saw for his winter fuel because he gets it through a pipe from the gas company, now spends more for golf equipment at the hardware store than he ever did on tools for more productive forms of manual labor.

The man who would have been content a generation ago with a bamboo fishing-rod and piece of line, totaling a cost of about a dollar, perhaps spends as much this year on his fishing outfit as he does for a new automobile. Quick transportation has made it possible for a fisherman to go far beyond the limits of his own locality. If there are no fishing waters near home, he can jump into his car and travel to a place where fish are said to be plentiful and eager for bait. (The only trouble is that this very accessibility of distant waters often means that too many other fishermen have already been there.)

Just recently, I heard a hardware dealer talking about a carload lot of mulch paper. Who ever heard of mulch paper a few years ago? Perhaps one should explain that mulch paper is spread between rows of vegetables in gardens, to conserve moisture and prevent growth of weeds. When the paper begins to rot and disappear, as it does after a season, it becomes good fertilizer. Truly, new items come into use even more rapidly than the old become obsolete. Profits that the hardware dealer once made on bicycles he now makes on radios.

Most of us find that, despite all the items of hardware that we no longer buy, we go to a hardware store more often than

ever before. Electrical contrivances for the home and an alluring variety of modern devices of all sorts makes us spend more money with hardware dealers than we intended. If this were not true, Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co. could not be selling 60,000 different articles.



Charles John Whipple

Chapter XI

# Facing Difficulties

When Daniel H. Burnham, famous architect of the Chicago World's Fair buildings, founded the Chicago Plan Commission, with the idea of making the city more beautiful, he couldn't possibly have foreseen how many gray hairs he would hasten in the executive offices of Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co.

The Chicago Beautiful movement, as it was called before being dignified by the name Chicago Plan Commission, had for its object the carrying out of a constructive plan for boulevards and the future grouping of important buildings. One of the outstanding achievements of this commission has been the widening and straightening of Michigan Boulevard and the building of the two-level Michigan Boulevard bridge. This plan included a two-level east and west drive—Wacker Drive—on the south bank of the Chicago river. It was an excellent idea and the only flaw in it, or rather the only distressing feature of it, from the point of view of Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co., was that the plan meant the condemnation of their plant and property extending from State street to Wabash avenue on South Water street.

Negotiations between the city and the hardware company for the property were started in 1919, but until the necessary bond issue was approved in June, 1924, it was not certain that the plan would be carried out. Then the company knew that they must move. Naturally, it is no trifling task to step out and find a properly located, reasonably-priced city site for an immense building. It was not until December of that year that they were able to buy the ground adjoining their warehouse on East North

Water street—just three blocks from where William G. Hibbard had his first store. They immediately set to work on building plans. But, though the company acted quickly, the city's plans had somehow advanced more rapidly than was expected. At the end of September, with their new building only half completed, the company got notice that they must move—and soon! The contract had already been awarded for tearing down their old building. Where should they go? It is one thing to be forced out of a dwelling house, store furniture and go temporarily to a hotel; but finding temporary lodging for an immense hardware plant, and without interrupting business, is something else again. After a desperate search, the company found, at Paulina and Harrison streets, a building of almost identical size as their old one. They could rent it for six months. But even that did not solve their problems, for the moving of their immense stock could hardly be accomplished on the instant and workmen would be there almost any day to start tearing down their building. What should be done?

Mr. Charles, president of the company, and Mr. Whipple, vice-president, decided to go together to the office of the contractor who had been awarded the job of tearing down the old building, and make a plea for ten days more time. With ten days' reprieve perhaps they could be all moved before the wreckers came.

They were compelled to wait what seemed to them a needlessly long time before the contractor talked to them at all, and when he did see them he showed no special inclination to be courteous or considerate.

"Yes, we can do it," he said, "but it will cost you $50,000."

Just then he was called away, leaving the two visitors to themselves.

"John, what shall we tell him?" asked Mr. Charles.

"I think," replied Whipple, "that we should tell him to go to hell!"

And that was substantially what they did tell him.

Their decision meant that they must perform the seemingly impossible task of moving their entire stock to the temporary quarters over one week-end—from Saturday to Monday. Impossible, but they did it!

Luckily, in planning the new building, Mr. Whipple, as engineer in charge, had carefully worked out the space required for every item of merchandise. By means of blue prints and a painstakingly evolved numbering system, he could definitely indicate the future location of each and every article. This was of inestimable help in moving to the temporary quarters, for it was possible to sit down in an office and plan every detail of the move.

To erect shelving would have consumed priceless time. It was necessary to have a substitute that could be built on a quantity production basis. Box factories worked day and night making wooden packing boxes, about 3½ feet long, and these were used to move the merchandise, as well as to serve as temporary shelving for it afterward. Some 22,000 of these wooden boxes were used. Just try to picture what a pile these would make! If placed end to end they would have covered a stretch of 14 miles!

The moving was started at noon on Saturday and proceeded with rigid, military-like schedule, which provided that every hour must see certain stages of the job done. Employes exhibited a fine degree of loyalty, as well as amazing enthusiasm for this great battle with the impossible. Every able-bodied employe, regardless of position, pitched in to do his share of manual labor. Even women, not excepting stenographers and filing clerks, insisted upon contributing what they could in the handling of smaller and lighter items. The men were supposed to work continuously in three eight-hour shifts, that the job might proceed without interruption day and night. But many men became so stirred by the do-or-die spirit of the enterprise that they toiled for *40 hours* without stopping for sleep.

By Monday noon, just 48 hours after the job was started, every piece of merchandise and furniture had been moved!

Business was partly interrupted only one day—Monday. Office work never was interrupted at all. Office employes who left their desks Saturday noon in the old building returned Monday morning to find them set up in the new quarters all ready for a normal day's work. By Tuesday the company was able to handle business as usual, just as if nothing extraordinary had happened.



*Moving*

One phase of the moving problem was guarding the goods along the line of march. Every available employe was needed to pack goods at one end and place it properly at the other. None could be spared for police duty. The city of Chicago supplied a squad of motorcycle policemen to patrol the three-mile stretch between the old and new location. All the teamsters and truck-drivers, the majority of whom had been hired temporarily, for this one job, and were unknown to the company, were encouraged to believe that at least 50 such guardians were constantly on duty. But the truth was that not more than half a dozen motorcycle policemen were alongside the procession at any one time. It was a grand game of bluff. This was in Chicago, mind you, but out of a $3,000,000 stock of goods, not a dime's worth was lost en route. The whole moving project was a truly marvelous achievement in which every employe properly felt a glow of pride. Still, it was not an undertaking that anybody

wished to tackle all over again. The move into the new plant, completed six months later, was carried out in a manner far less spectacular and with ample leisure. Part of the goods were moved fully three months before the final transfer was made. When at last all employes were ensconced in their new quarters, the organized convenience of the place gave everybody a sense of well-being that was not a mere notion. With every possible labor-saving plan, as well as every modern sanitary comfort, filtered water, filtered air, and whatnot, they had come a long way from the days when a common sink and roller towel were considered good enough—when drinking-water stood about in pails in summer time with a dash of oatmeal dumped into it to keep employes from drinking too much—when one's noontime meal came out of a tin lunch-box and was eaten from the top of a nail keg. Every angle of the new plant bespoke the passing of those days when employes' muscles and brains were treated as if they were almost equally unimportant.


HIBBARD
SPENCER
BARTLETT
&CO

Chapter XII

# A Modern Distributing Plant

Anyone asked to give his general impression of the Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co. plant, after a first visit, might well reply: Motion! Quiet, steady movement is the keynote of the place. Whether one notes the order clerks on roller skates, or sections in the floor moving along, belt-like, carrying great piles of goods forward, everything suggests not merely activity, but the activity of unswerving advancement without waste effort. It is the movement of well-oiled machinery that is sure of its own power and never creaks.



*Buyers' Office*

Even the typewritten records of the orders themselves are never allowed to accumulate at a desk, but are dropped on a moving belt as rapidly as completed. Everything about the plant is like that—always quietly headed toward its goal.

In planning this great fireproof, 14-story sunlighted building, and its equipment, Mr. Whipple had in mind two primary requirements—to save time in filling orders and, more particularly, to save labor. In proof of the practical workability of his scheme, every order, no matter how large, is completed exactly three hours and ten minutes after it is released from the office; and the new plant, even after absorbing a greatly increased volume of business, is operated with 250 fewer employes.

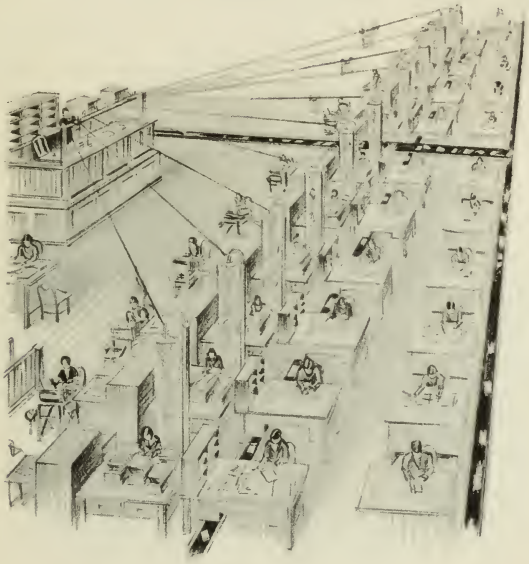
At an earlier period in the company's history, if an engineer among the officers had proposed installing machinery to replace 250 men, he might have been whisked off to the court house for an insanity inquest. To begin with, everybody would have known that the thing couldn't be done. But even if it could be done, why do it? Why buy costly labor-saving equipment when porters and stockmen could be hired for $1.50 a day, and a teamster and horses for $2 a day. Today, the cost of trucking is so great that a middleman or distributor feels duty-bound to justify his economic function, in warehousing and re-shipping, by guarding his customer against every needless expense. In short, unless the middleman can get goods from maker to ultimate consumer more cheaply than it could possibly be done by other means, he knows that he isn't doing a good job.




*Unloading Cars Inside the Building*

The man who buys a tack-hammer from a retailer dealing in Hibbard hardware could not be expected to see with the naked eye a relationship between its reasonable price and a well-organized, well-lighted distributing plant in Chicago. But every employe there, working by sunlight instead of by artificial light, can do his work better, more rapidly, and therefore more

cheaply, than if the place had not been planned for its purpose with scientific care.

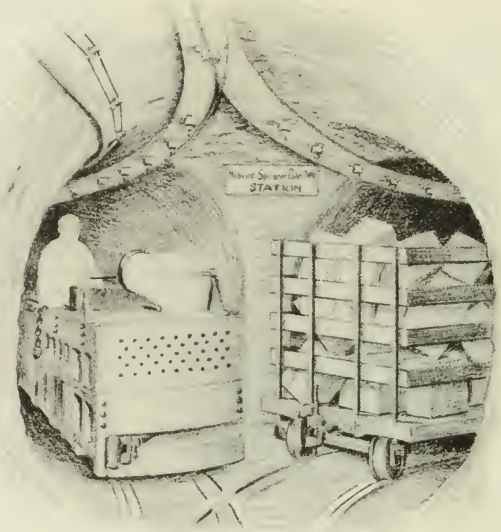


*Dispatching Orders by Carriers, Belts, and Tubes*

When one sees a whole train of cars backing into the plant for unloading, and lake boats making regular stops at the company's back door, it becomes evident that here is not a picayunish enterprise. Right across the Chicago river, within a stone's throw from the plant itself, is a freight yard to which loaded trucks are carried on lighters and then shoved right alongside of so-called trap-cars for final loading. These trap-cars go direct to more than 900 important points in the United States *every night*. Besides all this transportation, the company has immediate access to the network of underground freight tunnels provided by the city of Chicago. Street trucking has been reduced to the minimum.

Important as is the physical side of this great modern plant, the place would have no soul if it were not for the spirit of the employes. This spirit makes it a living thing. Employes here are

not just people who draw wages and come and go, but men and women who stay at their jobs year after year and have a feeling that they are part of an important institution.



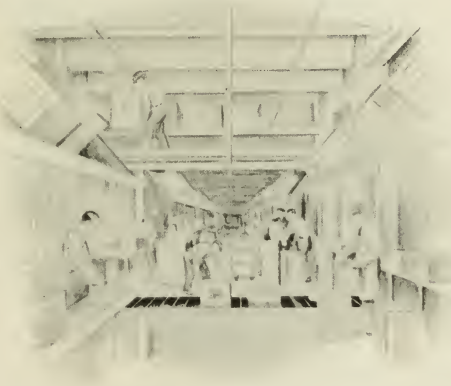

*Shipping by Tunnel*

In an atmosphere where promotions and rewards have gone to those who worked most willingly and most intelligently, shirkers have automatically been eliminated and the organization



*Order Filling*

has thus been built for permanence. Not long ago, at a business meeting of 25 employes, they discovered that their average length of service was 34 years. A few years ago, records showed that August Schuman had been employed continuously as packer for 50 years. Because he was a competent workman, he took



*Packing*

good care of his tools, and in his half century of packing goods for shipment had used only two hammers. The first hammer lasted for 27 years.

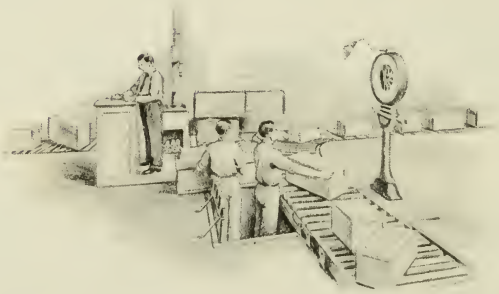
In the early days, the majority of new employes were young boys and they invariably began at $4 a week. A young man might show himself worth more than that after only a week's trial, but unwritten law said that $4 a week should be his initial wage. Perhaps there was a feeling that a proper sense of one's unimportance at the start-off was good for one's soul. Another early tradition was that the newest employe in any department should sweep the floor. Today, with more scientific management in force, the belief prevails that it would be poor business to have a new employe sweep the floor. Unless he is going to make sweeping his life work, he should be learning something more directly connected with selling hardware, without even one day's delay. Moreover, it turns out that floor-sweeping

requires a certain kind of skill. A newcomer, unaccustomed to sweeping, is almost sure to take too much time and stir up too



*Floor Conveyors*

much dust. Today all floors in the Hibbard plant are swept by professional sweepers who, incidentally, are paid by the square yard.



*Weighing and Checking*

This plan of paying employees on a piecework basis, rewarding each man according to what he has accomplished, is carried out by Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co. wherever possible. Each employe receives a definite salary, but he also receives a bonus

for whatever he has done above a certain required minimum. The bonus is always paid in a separate envelope and this envelope is of a different color than the one containing the regular salary. Back of this is a bit of human psychology. If one employe receives a bonus, as indicated by a special bonus envelope dropped on his desk, in full view of his neighboring employes, those about him who have failed to earn a bonus are reminded that they have not come up to their full possibilities. After a



*Assembling Freight*

reasonable opportunity to learn a job, any employe who fails to earn more money than his minimum guarantee is regarded as perhaps unsuited to a live, vigorous organization.



*Shipping and Receiving by Boat*

Since 1905, the company has had a pension fund in operation and in the quarter century since its inception, this fund has

supplied 170 former employes with a total of more than $400,000. At the present time, some 55 people are on the pension roll and the assets of the fund are well over half a million dollars. For years, too, it has been the policy of the company to pay employes liberally for time lost on account of illness, and to give vacations with pay after a year of service. Likewise, every employe and his family may have hospital care at St. Luke's, and the company uses the full-time services of a visiting nurse. Every new employe is asked to submit to a thorough physical examination. Not a bad lot to work for, these Hibbard, Spencer, Bartletts!

In gathering facts for this little history, I have observed that nearly everybody connected with Hibbard hardware was less interested in the past than in the future. All were trying to be helpful, but they showed more enthusiasm whenever we began to talk about plans for the years to come. They are all looking ahead. The last three-quarters of a century brought us from an age of crudities to one of miracles. What is left to happen in the years to come? With scientific research now a regular part of modern business, the years ahead should show even more radical changes than have come since the days when William G. Hibbard and his associates started to sell hardware at 45 South Water street, 75 years ago. Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co., having the kind of foundation that permits building for the long pull, expect to continue adjusting themselves to the world as they find it and to be selling on a big scale those articles of hardware most in demand 75 years hence. What will those articles be? What will be the most profitable single item on a hardware dealer's list? A *lot* of questions I should like to ask the merchandise manager of Hibbard, Spencer, Bartlett & Co. in the year 2005!



*Looking Forward . . . Will Freight Be Dispatched by Aeroplane?*

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